



To: Town Council  
Fr: Paul Bockelman  
Town Manager  
Dt: December 16, 2021  
Re: Town Manager Report for December 20, 2021

---

All Town Manager Reports are available on the Town's website here:  
<https://www.amherstma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=240>

### **COVID-19**

- Vaccine:
    - The Town continues its vaccine clinics every Thursday from 3:00 - 6:00 in the Bangs Community Center. The next clinic will be December 23<sup>rd</sup>. Information on vaccines in Amherst can be found here: <https://www.amherstcovid19.org/vaccine>
    - Appointments for the Bangs Center clinics can be made here: <https://home.color.com/vaccine/register/townofamherst?calendar=1647d54b-9340-4d5b-865f-e8c15dedb323>
    - Vaccine appointments can also be found on the State's website: <https://vaxfinder.mass.gov/>.
    - It is important to reiterate:
      - People aged 12 and older who live, work, or study in Massachusetts can now get vaccinated.
      - If you are uninsured, you can still receive a vaccine.
      - **The vaccine is free – there is no cost to you.**
      - Vaccine sites may request documentation, but you are not required to have it to receive the vaccine and you cannot be denied access to the vaccine for not having ID.
      - **Documentation is not required to be vaccinated.**
      - Sites will NOT ask for proof of immigration status. Any data collected for the COVID-19 vaccination program may only be used for public health purposes – not for civil, criminal, nor immigration enforcement.
  - Testing:
    - Rapid Antigen Tests:
-

- The Town has received shipment of at-home rapid antigen test kits from the State. There are just und 15,000 tests included with the shipment.
- Each city or town will be able to determine how best to distribute tests within their community municipalities are asked to prioritize those most in need, allocating equitably and at locations accessible to individuals and families who are determined to be in high need and as quickly as possible during the holiday season.
- The Commonwealth is paying \$5 per test. The tests can be completed in 15 minutes without the need to send a sample to a laboratory; a mobile phone or computer is not needed for any part of the test. Individuals 2 years of age and up can use the tests regardless of vaccination status or whether or not they have symptoms.
- Amherst was one of 102 communities selected based on the proportion of families living at or below the poverty level within their respective communities.
- PCR Tests:
  - The Town's Health Department continues to offer asymptomatic, unobserved community testing for Covid-19. These PCR testing kits are also free. This service is in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts Amherst.
  - The University of Massachusetts continues to provide testing for members of the community utilizing the self-test drop-off system. More information may be found here: <https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/coronavirus/covid-19-testing>
  - No testing will be done from December 23<sup>rd</sup> through January 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Case Counts:

- Case counts continue to increase. The Health Director projects continued increases during the holiday season. Family gatherings and large social events are the most likely places to see the spread of the virus.
- The Town updates the public dashboard daily during the week, so please feel free to check here <https://www.amherstcovid19.org/home>
- This is happening even with a large percentage of the Town's population – estimated at 93% - being vaccinated. This percentage is calculated weekly with the assumptions and calculations posted here: <https://amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/4401>
- Daily case counts along with 14-day average incidence rate are provided here: <https://www.amherstcovid19.org/>
- The Town has links to the websites of all three institutions of higher education here: <https://www.amherstcovid19.org/schools>
- Mask Mandate:
  - The Health Director anticipates continuing the current mask mandate at least through the end of January to assess the status of cases once students begin returning from their winter breaks.
  - Complaints about indoor mask non-compliance should be forwarded to the Health Department for follow up.
- Meeting Remotely:
  - Based on advice from the Town's Health Director on the status of the Covid-19 pandemic, I announced that Town committees and boards will continue to meet remotely and will not be meeting in person until April 1, 2022, at the earliest.

- This decision is in accordance with “An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency”. This Act includes an extension, until April 1, 2022, of the remote meeting provisions of the Governor’s March 12, 2020, Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. The new law has two major parts.
  - First, the new law allows public bodies to continue providing live “adequate, alternative means” of public access to the deliberations of the public body, instead of holding meetings in a public place that is open and physically accessible to the public. “Adequate, alternative means” may include, without limitation, providing public access through telephone, internet, or satellite enabled audio or video conferencing or any other technology that enables the public to clearly follow the proceedings of the public body in real time.
  - Second, the new law authorizes all members of a public body to continue participating in meetings remotely; the Open Meeting Law’s requirement that a quorum of the body and the chair be physically present at the meeting location remains suspended

### **University/College Relations**

- University of Massachusetts:
  - Covid-19:
    - The University has issued a directive that states that, in accordance with the existing requirement that students be fully immunized against COVID-19, all students will be required to receive a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot. In addition, there is an expectation that all students will be tested two weeks prior to the start of spring classes.
    - The University also announced that it would continue the current [campus indoor face covering requirement](#) to start the spring semester. The face covering requirement will be reviewed during the semester.
    - We met on Thursday to review case numbers, discuss plans for the return of staff and students in January, and contemplate the status of the virus into the Spring semester.
  - Strategic Partnership Agreement:
    - Discussions with the University for a successor Strategic Partnership Agreement continue.
  - P-3 Development:
    - The demolition work at the old Lincoln Apartments has been moving along steadily.
    - On December 20<sup>th</sup>, the University contractor will be putting up construction fencing around parking lot #32 at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Lincoln Avenue. This is so the contractor can start prepping the site for construction of the undergraduate housing building.
    - The University will be closing Lincoln Avenue from Massachusetts Avenue to the entrance of lot 32.

- The University will revive the UMass community relations newsletter which has been dormant for a couple of years so that it can share construction updates with the neighbors directly through the newsletter in the future.
- Amherst College:
  - Active discussions for a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the President and staff continue.
  - Long-time staff lead for the College, Jim Brassord, announced his retirement. He will retire in March but maintain a contractual relationship with the College for a year after that to support the transition.
- Hampshire College:
  - Hampshire College has advertised for sale a 7.69 acre land site for development located directly across from Hampshire College, next to Atkins Farm Market and Applewood. The two parcels wrap around (to the West and Southwest) 1151 West Street and Atkin's Farm Market.
  - Active discussions with the College about its needs and the Town's needs continue.

### Racial Equity

- Reparations:
  - The African Heritage Reparation Assembly continues its weekly meeting schedule. The Committee is reviewing its mission, meeting schedule, and projected timeline of work.
- Community Responders Program:
  - The Implementation Team is meeting weekly to work on the numerous details of developing and implementing the new community responder (CRESS) program.
  - A reorganization plan has been approved by the Town Council.
- Other Initiatives:
  - A reorganization plan for the Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Department has been approved by the Town Council.
  - Recruitment for the Community Safety and Social Justice Committee continues. We are struggling with recruiting enough applicants to create a viable pool. We have developed a special outreach effort to attract a strong group of candidates that represents the Town. <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=3020>

### Outreach

- Kudos:
  - Brianna Sunryd: Communications Manager and Community Participation Officer Brianna Sunryd was selected as one of the top influencers in local government, receiving the recognition from the organization, Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL).
    - The coveted recognition is called the Traeger Award, named after [Chris Traeger](#), the city manager for the fictional City of Pawnee, Indiana on the show "Park and Recreation." He was known for extreme energy and commitment to improving local government.
    - The list is based on an individual's influence in their community and outside their community through professional associations, mentoring, and writing.
    - In her award, the ELGL called Brianna "*Helpful, Kind, Smart!*" and added, "*Brianna is a rock star! Everything she touches becomes better because of her*"

*experience and perspective. She is focused on community engagement and finding new ways to bring all voices into community conversations. She is gifted user of communications platforms, and thinks strategically about communications for the agency. Brianna is also the first to step up and say “let’s try it” and this drives innovation. Thanks to her work, we have seen the organization’s business process improvement efforts implemented. Lastly, we need more creative brains in local government and Brianna is one of the best.”*

- **Bill Laramée:** Police Officer Bill Laramée was awarded the annual “Officer of the Year Award” by the Western Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association.
  - Chief Livingstone stated “that Officer Laramée since joining the Amherst Police Department has been indispensable in filling a myriad of roles within the department throughout his career.”



- Officer Laramée has been a patrol officer for the Town of Amherst since 1995 and holds a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice from Castleton University and a master’s degree in criminal justice administration from Western New England University.
- Officer Laramée founded the Amherst Police Youth Adventure Academy.
- In 2020, he introduced the concept and founded the department’s Comfort Dog Program. Officer Laramée and his chocolate Labrador partner, Winston, work together providing comfort, support, and community outreach on a daily basis.
- Officer Laramée is the department’s officer in charge of the bicycle unit and an international trainer for the International Police Mountain Bike Association.
- He serves as the neighborhood liaison officer working in partnership with community stakeholders and area colleges conducting outreach and addressing quality of life issues to promote the safety and well-being of the student population and entire Amherst Community.
- Officer Laramée is the department’s liaison to the Strategic Partnership for Families and Youth Coalition whose mission is to help communities reduce risk factors that make it more likely youth will engage in unhealthy behaviors, while increasing protective factors that encourage them to make healthy choices.
- Officer Laramée oversees the department’s physical fitness program.

- New School Building Website: The Elementary School Building Committee unveiled its project website this week. The site can be found here: <https://www.amherst-school-project.com/>

# Amherst Elementary School Building Project

*Mission: To build a high-performance elementary school that supports excellent child-centered education, meets diverse educational needs of our children in daylight-filled classrooms, uses the outdoors for education and play, and does so in a cost-effective “green” building that incorporates “net zero” energy principles.*



- Cuppa Joe with Paul: Our Cuppa Joe outreach efforts will resume in 2022.
- Translation Services: The Town is expected to receive a grant of \$80,000 for “Translation, Civic Engagement, and Participation” efforts by the Town. These are funds that were secured by our State Representative and State Senator in the State budget. The purpose of the funds is to “support translation services, promote engagement and inclusion, and facilitate participation in civic activities for BIPOC and ESL communities.”

## Legal Update

- Jones Library:
  - We are awaiting the Judge’s decision on the latest legal case.
  - An Open Meeting Law complaint filed with the State against the Board of Registrars was determined to be without merit by the Attorney General’s office. In its decision, the Attorney General’s office stated: *“Following our review, we find that the Board did not violate the Open Meeting Law. In reaching this determination, we reviewed the original complaint, the Board’s response to the complaint, and the complainant’s request for further review.”*

## In the Wings

- Parking Recommendations: Parking recommendations for the downtown area are scheduled to be presented to the Town Council in January.
- Water Regulations: Updated and revised water regulations are prepared and will be scheduled to be presented to the Town Council after the first of the year.
- Sewer Regulations: Updated and revised sewer regulations are being prepared and will be scheduled to be presented to the Town Council after the first of the year.

## Department Updates

- Finance: The Finance Department has initiated budget discussions with departments, having initial meetings with each department prior to the holiday break.
- Public Works:
  - Northampton Road:
    - The State Department of Transportation intends to begin the reconstruction of Northampton Road from South Pleasant Street to University Drive. The work is projected to continue through April 2024.
    - The Mass DOT roadway reconstruction project was awarded to Caracas Construction Corp.
    - This will be an extensive construction project that includes replacement of Town utilities, relocation of poles, installation of a multi-use path, and other work. Initial work this fall will involve construction signs and erosion controls and tree work.
- Economic Development:
  - Wi-Fi Downtown: The Town has been awarded a FY22 Community Compact Cabinet IT grant in the amount of \$74,625 to undertake the construction of a downtown public Wi-Fi network. This will supplement and, in some cases, supplant the existing Wi-Fi network. The competition for funding was especially intense, and Amherst's application was chosen due to "its ability to fulfill the core mission of the grant program, which is to drive innovation and transformation at the local level via investments in technology." Congratulations to our I.T. Department for preparing such a compelling grant application.
  - Free Parking: There continues to be free parking every Saturday from Thanksgiving to Christmas in the downtown area.
  - Performance Shell: The Town Council voted to support the placement of the Performance Shell on the Town Common. The BID will move forward with fund raising and developing more detail schematic design plans for Town staff to review. The BID anticipates the performance shell would become a reality in 2023 or 2024.
- Public Safety:
  - Police:
    - Accreditation: The Police Department has requested an on-site assessment by the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission. This is a necessary step to continue to be recognized as an accredited agency.
      - In 2000, the Amherst Police Department was the second police department in the Commonwealth to obtain accredited status.
      - The Department must demonstrate that it is in compliance with the Commission's mandatory standards as well as optional standards.
      - Assessors will be examining the Department's policies, procedures, facilities and equipment.
      - The Police Chief has invited members of the Town Council to speak to the assessment team during their three-day visit to the Town. The assessors will be in Town from January 17-19, 2022.
      - We will organize any Town Council participation through the Council President.

- Fire:
  - Ambulance: The new ambulance which was ordered months ago is expected to be placed in service shortly.
  - Fire Pumper: The Town appropriated funds for a new Fire Truck. The specifications for the truck are being reviewed and it is likely the costs of the truck may exceed the appropriation, requiring staff to seek additional funds from the Town Council.
- Town Clerk:
  - Reprecincting: The reprecincting maps prepared by the Town and submitted to the State have been approved by the State.
- Human Resources:
  - The H.R. Department has been busy recruiting for the numerous openings in the Town including the two recent department head positions.
  - In addition, the department has been active in ongoing collective bargaining, preparing for collective bargaining for FY23.
  - The H.R. Director has also initiated discussions with collective bargaining units to meet the requirement to conduct impact bargaining with several bargaining units as we work through the details of establishing the CRES program.
  - The H.R. Department supported the Town's employees as they organized two events for the holidays. There will be a "drive through" hot chocolate station on the Town Common to offer cheer and goodie bags to Town employees. There will also be an employee recognition virtual event later that day. These events replace the traditional holiday gathering held in December. Everything is paid for by donations from Town staff.
- Conservation and Development:
  - Planning:
    - The Town was awarded a \$75,800 grant to eliminate architectural barriers found at the main entrance to the Bangs Community Center, including auto door controls, entrance improvements, and signage. Congratulations to our talented staff who continue to win grant awards in a highly competitive environment.
    - Flood Maps:
      - The Town is updating its Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) and Flood Insurance Study (FIS). Maps have been available for review since July 2020 and are now in a 90-day statutory appeal period, which ended on December 9<sup>th</sup>.
      - FEMA now has a 60-day period to conduct quality review of the maps.
      - In February, Town staff will present an updated overview of the project to the Town Council.
      - After FEMA's review, there will be a six-month compliance period during which the maps, zoning bylaw text, and Flood Insurance Study Report will be presented to the Town Council for adoption.
      - The Town expects the flood-mapping project to be concluded by the summer of 2022.
  - Sheltering:
    - Craig's Doors is operating its new Congregate site at the Lutheran Church up to a maximum number is 23 guests.



- University Motor Lodge is at capacity with 28-31 guests. The Town and Amherst are working to identify a warming space.
- The Town is committing \$1 million for permanent shelter/supportive housing and \$1 million for affordable housing. We have had productive conversations with the leaders of Craig’s Doors about possible locations.
- The Town is building a new rest room for Craigs Doors in the trailer they own and operate on the lot at the First Baptist Church.
- Craig’s Doors has secured the former VFW building on Main Street as a day shelter for those experiencing homelessness. Town officials (inspections, fire, etc.) have worked with Craig’s Doors to get the building inspected and ready for occupancy. This is a very positive development for our community.

- Community Services:

- Senior Center: Temporary Director Helen MacMellon has been remarkable at managing the Senior Center’s activities and continuing her important social work. I thank her for her hard work. We look forward to the new director starting on January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

- Health: See above.

- Recreation:

- The Department is planning for WinterFest, February 5<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>. Again, we will be partnering with the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce and Business Improvement Association. This will include the very popular Luminaria event on the Town Common.

- The Department, in conjunction with the Jones Library, will host a Winter Solstice story reading at Kendrick Park on December 21<sup>st</sup> at 4:00 p.m. This will be fun for the entire family and take advantage of our new playground.



- Sustainability:
  - Bike Share:
    - Town Hall docks/bikes have been removed for the winter. The kiosk will remain. All other stations in town (and at UMASS) will operate throughout the winter.
    - Installation of new stations on West Street and South East Street are in progress. Signage and rails are scheduled to go in, but docks will not be put in place until the power connection is confirmed.
  - CAARP: The Town is seeking funding to develop and implement an innovative rental efficiency policy, one of the five priority initiatives in the Town’s Climate Action Adaptation and Resiliency Plan.

**Delegated Authority:**

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons:
- Short-Term Parking Requests:
  - Free Parking Downtown – November 27, December 4, 11, and 18 – requested by the Amherst Business Improvement District
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures:

**Major Capital Projects:**

- Jones Library: The Jones Library Building Committee held its first meeting this week. Its next meeting will be January 12<sup>th</sup>.
- DPW Building/Fire Building: Staff are exploring multiple options for a new site for the Department of Public Works.
- Schools:
  - The Amherst Elementary School Project is finally underway with the recent selection of DiNisco Design to lead the design of the project. This project follows prior projects that studied options for a future elementary school. The first studied options for a project on the Wildwood site and the second studied comparable options on the Fort River site. The Town’s [Elementary School Building Committee \(ESBC\)](#) will now revisit current options with a new team.
  - The goal for the project is to create a high-performance elementary school that supports excellent child-centered education, meets the diverse educational needs of the Town’s children in daylight-filled spaces, uses the outdoors for education and play, and does so in a cost-effective “green” building that incorporates “net zero” energy principles.
  - In order to share project information, a [new webpage](#) (noted above) has launched that will provide information and updates about the project. Please stay tuned to this site as the project moves forward in the New Year.
  - The ESBC held a joint meeting of the School Committee and the Elementary School Building Committee on December 14<sup>th</sup> where the Design Team was introduced to the School Committee.

**Projects Update:**

- Dog Park: The work on the dog park has concluded for the season. Increased costs were identified and a request for additional funds was approved by the Town Council.

- North Common Restoration/Main Street Parking Lot: Staff are developing the plans. We will be convening regular public meetings of stakeholders to ensure all opinions and views are heard. I anticipate the first stakeholder meeting will be in January.
- Hickory Ridge: The parking lot has been reconfigured to accommodate use during the winter. Details on the sale continue to be negotiated and finalized.
- North Amherst Library:
  - The Massachusetts Architectural Access Board voted unanimously to approve a variance the Town requested to maintain the existing front entry/egress at the library.
  - With this decision, and with the completion of construction plans, we will now be releasing the bid documents. We anticipate an approximately eight week bidding period with sub-bids, etc.
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant: Town staff presented the 25% plans to the Town Council at its meeting on November 29<sup>th</sup>.
- Solar on the Landfill:
  - Construction work on the North Landfill has begun, along with the fence around the South Landfill. The work will be able to continue through most of the winter.
- Belchertown Road/East Street School:
  - Town issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to lease the properties located at 31 South East Street and 72-80 Belchertown Road for the development of affordable housing.
  - The Request for Proposals is here: [www.amherstma.gov/bids](http://www.amherstma.gov/bids)
  - Two proposals were received November 19<sup>th</sup>. A committee are reviewing the proposals to ensure they are compliant with the RFP and will submit a recommendation to me for the award. This is likely to happen in January.

### **Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

- December 23-24 – Christmas Eve/Christmas holidays celebrated
- December 31 – New Year’s holiday celebrated
- January 3<sup>rd</sup> – Town Council swearing-in and meeting
- January 17<sup>th</sup> – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
- January 21<sup>st</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> – Massachusetts Municipal Association Annual Meeting and Trade Show
- January 24<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting